

Carefree Path of Dreams

Chapter 26: The 4 Heavenly Gates

"Father....."

Outside the valley, Zhou Wenwu looked back in the direction of the secluded valley and said, "Let my sister becomes a slave to someone else? If this piece of news spread, what will the Zhou family's reputation become?"

"You are over worried. If both of us don't reveal anything, no one will know that it is Wenxin!"

Zhou Tong shook his head and said, "Your sister is too stubborn. It is time for her to look for someone to improve her character. Since I'm still alive now, it is still okay. When I'm dead, she will likely bring trouble for the Zhou family!"

"But....."

Zhou Wenwu disapproved. "I still feel that this is inappropriate. Sister's reputation....hold on a second. Father, you want to...."

"Haha, the young Master is not that kind of person. Even if so, what is there to lose out on if I have a son-in-law?"

Zhou Tong stroked his moustache and said, "Even though your sister is stubborn, her character is actually good in nature. We should let them get together first. Even if their relationship doesn't work out in the end, at least your sister is able to benefit from learning a few techniques from the Master!"

"Father, looks like you have much confidence in this Master!"

Even though Zhou Wenwu stayed silent, he knew that Zhou Tong had already made a decision and would not change it no matter what.

Also, the mindset here was different. Marrying off one's daughter or sister to a capable man meant that others would not look down on you.

"Not to mention....."

Zhou Tong heaved a long sigh, "Qingye City's situation is unpredictable. I am finding an alternative path for the Zhou family. Wenwu, don't follow me back to the city. Just head straight to Lieyang County and find your aunt. Stay there for a period of time and enjoy yourself!"

"The situation is in such a bad state now?"

Zhou Wenwu was surprised and this would mean that Zhou Tong would be on his own and away from the family. Zhou Wenwu angrily said, "Father, when Song Yujie died, you still haven't recovered from your injuries. The whole family was in the mountains. How will Song Zhong dare to accuse you?"

"In the past, he would not dare to. However, it is hard to say now...."

Zhou Tong shook his head.

A desperate person was the scariest. Song Zhong lost his child when he was old and since then, he had lived alone. It was hard to say what his mind had become.

Plus, he was also an elder. Zhou Tong, on the other hand, was just an Outer Sect Deacon and both of them were enemies of the same Sect.

If the other party lost his loved one and felt like committing suicide, he would also bring others along and die together!

Zhou Tong's face was gloomy and suspected that the poison case was likely to have originated from the Song family.

Of course, Zhou Wenwu wouldn't need to know about this suspicion.

"Alright, Father will with all of us. We have nothing to be afraid of since we did nothing wrong!"

Zhou Wenwu shuddered as Song Zhong, who broke through two Gates, was a [Martial Artist (7th Gate)] expert!

If Song Zhong became crazy and started killing everyone in Qingye City, no one could stop him as the city was not part of the Spirit Returning Sect.

"Leave?"

Zhou Tong listened and gave a sorrowful smile. "You should leave with your sister first. I, being the father, shouldn't!"

This was just a prediction of the worst case scenario. It was totally unnecessary for now.

If the Zhou family migrated elsewhere, what would the rest of the Qingye City think?

If the Zhou family retreated and escaped to elsewhere when there was trouble, they would not have to think about living in the Qingye City ever again.

Nowadays, families here were like beasts as they had territories they controlled. Qingye City was the territory of the Zhou family. If this territory was abandoned, others would come and claim it.

Hence, the worse the situation became, the more Zhou Tong couldn't leave.

"Don't worry, Song Zhong and I are of the same Sect. With Lin family around, he will not dare to do anything funny!"

Even though Zhou Tong was worried, he still comforted Zhou Wenwu.

Even he himself also felt this way. If not, based on his cunning character, he would definitely not go back and die.

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"Your father sent you here to become my servant?"

At that moment, Fang Yuan stared at Zhou Wenxin and remained silent.

"Certainly.....certainly not...."

Zhou Wenxin immediately teared after hearing what Fang Yuan said.

Seeing that Fang Yuan stepped forward, she became even more terrified and retreated further with her hands clutching her shoulders. "What....what do you want? Don't come near me!"

"Why do you make me look like the bad guy?"

Fang Yuan stroked his chin and said, "I'm not interested in you. Even if I wanted to be mean, isn't it normal for me to have a servant?"

"Boohoo!"

After what he said, Zhou Wenxin couldn't endure any longer and cried out loud. "You are bullying me again....you are a bad guy...."

"Excuse me, you are being self-affectionate!"

Fang Yuan frowned and said, "I am preparing to send you out of the mountains today actually!"

"What?"

Zhou Wenxin stopped crying and lifted her head. Her teary eyes were staring right at Fang Yuan's.

She thought that she would be suffering since she landed onto a thief's hands. She didn't expect that Fang Yuan was not interested in her and was preparing to send her off!

At that moment, she felt humiliated instead of being fearful.

Previously, she thought that being a servant was humiliating. She didn't expect that being rejected to be someone's servant was even more humiliating!

"You are not willing to leave?"

Fang Yuan became a little interested and said, "Or would you prefer me to torture you?"

"I.....I....."

Zhou Wenxin bit her teeth tightly and couldn't wait to bite that cocky lad.

However, she recalled her father's advice on the situation of Qingye City and his scolding. She took a breath and said, "I will not leave!"

"What?"

Fang Yuan felt something strange about her sudden change in attitude. "Is your father leaving you? Looks like your family is seriously affected by the death of Song Yujie!"

"You can stay in this piece of wildland for as long as you want but I warn you first, do not enter the secluded valley or your life will be at risk!"

Fang Yuan gave a warning and decided to go back and ponder further.

Anyway, the Flower Fox Ferret would not be gentle towards anyone. If this lady indeed decided to explore the secluded valley, the Flower Fox Ferret will definitely not spare her life.

By that time, she would have become a fertilizer for the plants.

"No entry to the valley?"

Miss Zhou looked at her surroundings and heard noises made by the beasts from far. She shuddered and said, "Fine, I will not enter the valley!"

"Very well!"

Fang Yuan then left, leaving Zhou Wenxin behind.

With the camping resources her family gave, she definitely would survive out in the wild. Hence, Fang Yuan naturally wouldn't show any concern about her.

With regards to the news about her being a servant, which idiot would believe? Who would want to get into trouble?

.....

"She still hasn't left?"

Soon, the sun began to set and the sky gradually became dark.

Fang Yuan was reading a manual about the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique and gesturing subconsciously. He met the Flower Fox Ferret and asked about Miss Zhou.

The Flower Fox Ferret shook its head like a human.

"Hmm....looks like there is big trouble brewing in Qingye City...."

Fang Yuan got up and exhaled out a long breath. He looked in the direction of Qingye City and murmured something.

The reason why Zhou Tong was thick-skinned enough to make his daughter stay put was so that his daughter could be protected and he could pull connections with Fang Yuan.

Fang Yuan made a decision after understanding the whole situation.

If he was satisfied with the gift, he would accommodate the lady for a few days before sending her back to the city. If he was not satisfied, he would send her back right away. He followed his inclinations and what could Zhou Tong do about it?

"This 'Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique'.....".

After some serious considerations, Fang Yuan started to think carefully about the techniques that he had.

He was not only a young 4th Gate Martial Artist, he also had the Spirit Returning Heart Manual with him even though he was missing a few essential ones. After all, this manual was from the Spirit Returning Sect. The differentiation between the knowledge of martial arts and Gates mentioned in it should not be fake.

With such confidence, he looked at the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique once more and concluded that it was impossible for Zhou Tong to trick him.

"So far I have yet to attain [Black Sand Palm (Grade 5)] and [Rough Breathing Technique (Grade 5)]. I need to find other techniques to learn but the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique is different!"

Fang Yuan's eyes glittered. "It can combine with the Eagle Claw Technique to become the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique. This will enable me to train to the peak of the 12 Golden Gates!"

With this benefit alone, Fang Yuan would gladly accept Zhou Tong's request for his daughter to seek protection here.

After all, this was very important with regards to strengthening himself.

The gift was timely. Even though he had saved Zhou Tong's life, it was still a huge gift that was not proportionate compared to what Fang Yuan had done for him.

"The 12 Golden Gates. The 4 Heavenly Gates come after the first 8 Gates. The 4 Gates are namely Yin, Yang, Heaven and Earth. In the end, one will break through the Heaven Gate and become Wu Zong!"

"The Spirit Returning Heart Manual mentions briefly about this while the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique doesn't. It clearly shows that Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique is inferior as it does not mention anything related to Wu Zong!"

"But to me, having the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique is sufficient. Of course, I cannot give up Black Sand Palm. I should quickly train it to 5th Grade and then I will focus fully on attaining the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique!"

Fang Yuan was determined to do that.

If it was other martial artists who wanted to convert their techniques, they would have to take a long time.

For Fang Yuan, he was very familiar with the conversion and was able to get it with just a few practices.

After a night of training, he was satisfied by his improvement in the conversion. "If I am given another year to train, Song family, Spirit Returning Sect and others will have to step aside for me!"

"Keke!"

The Flower Fox Ferret suddenly came gesturing to Fang Yuan with its claws.

"Oh? Did something bad happened to Miss Zhou?"

Fang Yuan thought for a while and grabbed a handkerchief to wipe his sweat. He then reached the camping site, which was outside the valley.

He saw Zhou Wenxin curled up at a corner with her hands holding two flintstones, trying to light up a fire.

"Puff!"

Seeing her current state, Fang Yuan couldn't help but thought that Zhou Tong was funny.

It was already whimsical for Zhou Tong to send his daughter here to become a servant and even more amazing that she could take care of herself on her own.

Chapter 27: Destroying the Sect

Seeing the state of Zhou Wenxin, Fang Yuan frowned, turned around, returned to the valley and continued to drink his tea.

With an unreasonable attitude like hers, she deserved to be put through hardship. The best would be for her to not be able to take it any longer and leave on her own accord.

What was there to pity about?

Fang Yuan would never feel sorry for her.

Within the valley, Fang Yuan chopped wood, started a fire, cooked some porridge and made tea. The aroma filled the air and even to the entrance of the valley. Zhou Wenxin sniffed the aroma and her stomach was growling.

She unknowingly walked to the entrance of the valley, but froze there, afraid to take another step.

Zhou Wenxin was unreasonable but not stupid. She knew that if she did not heed Fang Yuan's warning to not enter the valley, no one, even her father, would be able to save her.

Furthermore, she could remember when her bodyguards were attacked by the white flash when she came to confront Fang Yuan the previous time. How would she dare to disobey?

She could not ignore the aroma coming out from the valley and continued eating her dry rations.

In the valley.

Fang Yuan and the Flower Fox Ferret each held a small bowl and ate the Vermillion Jade Rice Porridge, and had no intention of helping Zhou Wenxin.

The spiritual rice was so valuable to the extent that Fang Yuan made porridge with it. Regardless human or ferret, both value the spiritual rice a lot and have no intention of sharing it.

"Even my Pearl Jade Crystal Rice is also no ordinary rice, and eating it would bring many benefits to the body..."

Fang Yuan thought for a while, and sighed, "The spiritual tea is almost used up, and the Vermillion Jade Rice too... It has become painful for me to drink normal tea every morning, and if I run out of spiritual rice too, how can I survive?"

"Keke!"

The Flower Fox Ferret raised its little paws, as though it had the same sentiments.

"At the end of the day, the solution lies with the spiritual fertilizer!"

Fang Yuan looked at the Flower Fox Ferret, "When I asked you to bring me there previously, you were unwilling, and see what happened? I am now a martial artist of [Cultivation Level (Grade 4)], and I believe my abilities should be able to bring us there safely?"

"Keke?!"

The Flower Fox Ferret licked the last grain of porridge from its bowl before it was willing to put the bowl down, and went to an empty spot.

"Oh? You want to spar with me?"

Fang Yuan became energetic and knew that the Flower Fox Ferret was unsure of how good he had become. They needed to spar to confirm.

"Come on!"

Since killing Song Yujie, Fang Yuan realised that combat experience was far more valuable than the usual practice, and therefore was enthusiastic in taking on the Flower Fox Ferret.

"Don't take it easy on me!"

Fang Yuan took a deep breath, and both his palms became pitch-black, with his veins protruding out like worms. Both of his forearms became far thicker than before.

'This is usually how my Inner Power circulates within me, and now it has even affected my physical form?'

The parts that were strengthened by the Black Sand Palm were the palms, forearms, chest, abdomen. As for his back, legs and head, the changes were minor.

He had no choice. The Black Sand Palm was a low-tier technique which did not focus on defence. Being able to strengthen his arms was good enough.

"Ssss!"

As for the Flower Fox Ferret, he felt a little scared, after seeing the transformation Fang Yuan went through.

Whoosh!

Using his paws, the Flower Fox Ferret pounced towards Fang Yuan in a white flash like a lightning.

"Chi! Chi!"

Its talons were sharp and quick, like a knife.

"Good, don't take it easy!"

Fang Yuan struck his palm out.

He only fought with the Flower Fox Ferret once, which was their first encounter under the moonlight. The Flower Fox Ferret was not as smart then, and Fang Yuan did not know martial arts back then.

Now, both of them have their own improvements, which made Fang Yuan excited and eager to find out the Flower Fox Ferret's true standard.

"Boundless Black Sand!"

His right palm became black and had a whiff of fragrance; it was mildly hypnotizing.

"Hissss!"

The Flower Fox Ferret did not dare to go head-on with Fang Yuan. It curled into a shape of a letter 'Z' and ingeniously avoided Fang Yuan's palm before curling behind Fang Yuan, attacking him from the back.

"Reverse Palm!"

Fang Yuan turned around and immediately struck out another palm, and the Flower Fox Ferret avoided it easily. However, there were fresh claw marks on Fang Yuan's arm now.

"Hmm? Aggressive in attack, but weak in defence!"

Seeing the Flower Fox Ferret, Fang Yuan came to a conclusion.

He focused on his arms and channelled energy to it. The small wound was nothing to him, as the muscles contracted and stopped the bleeding.

"Good! One more time!"

Fang Yuan became increasingly excited as the battle ensued. He heaved, with both palms striking out, bringing with it a strong gust of wind and poison, which led the Flower Fox Ferret to retreat, and it did not dare to advance a single step.

'Mmm... The Flower Fox Ferrer's true ability is on par with a martial artist at the 7th Gate, and if not for me mastering my outer skills, I would lose... But my defence is too weak and any martial artist in the 4th Gate would be able to break through. I can only use speed to make up for my lack of defence.....'

After a long fight, Fang Yuan was breathless, and raised his hand, "Let's stop here!"

He needed to use all his energy and force the Flower Fox Ferret to retreat, and that took a lot of his Inner Power.

If he continued to use his Inner Power, he would have lost to the Flower Fox Ferret.

'If I was a martial artist of [Cultivation Level (Grade 5)], I would be able to hold on for a while more. Especially if I am able to break through Pain Gate, concentrate my Inner Power, then I would be able to last much longer, and from there should be able to win the Flower Fox Ferret...'

Fang Yuan clenched his fist and felt happy for his progress.

He was even happier when he realised that his experience bar was filled up by a large portion for 'Black Sand Palm', and smiled. "Very good, Flower Fox Ferret, next time we shall do this a few times each day!"

"Hissss..."

On the other end, a tired Flower Fox Ferret stuck out his tongue, because it was extremely tired for it to remain focused and go against such a strong palm.

"Keke!"

Fang Yuan's progress shocked the Flower Fox Ferret, as he made a sign with his paws.

"Can we do it now?"

Fang Yuan understood him and was ecstatic.

Could he finally reveal where all the spiritual fertilizer was hidden?

Once he had the endless supply of spiritual fertilizer, the production of spiritual tea and spiritual rice would not be a problem anymore, and his progress would be much faster!

...

Qinghe County, Kou Village.

The village was considered wealthy within the county, and the majority of the people here have the surname 'Kou', and of course, was the origin of a Palm Technique Master, the creator of Black Sand Palm, Kou Feng!

But right now, in the entire Kou Village, there were corpses everywhere.

A large fire rose to a few feet high and burnt down the entire village garden. In the village, members of the Spirit Returning Sect gave no considerations and killed anyone on sight.

As compared to the entire Qinghe county, the resistance within the Kou Village was small.

"Elder Song's orders are not to leave a single soul within the Kou Village!"

"Kill!"

...

Within the mess, from a random house, a black shadow lept out, with both palms pitch-black full of energy. Those members of the Spirit Returning Sect who came close to him held their throats, became pale and fell to the ground.

"Song Zhong, you bully!"

The black shadow was an old person with white hair, "The rules of the Martial World states that it is of no fault of the others, and even there is a reason, you only look for me, how dare you do this?"

"Rules of the Martial World?"

The cunning Song Zhong responded.

He floated extremely quickly towards the old man, like a ghost.

"Black Sand Palm!"

The old man concentrated on his life's training, struck out both palms, harnessing the most poisonous palms.

People only know Black Sand Palm for its aggressiveness, and many did not know that the strongest form of Black Sand Palm is by combining it with poison. This move of his revealed that he trained directly under the Kou Family. The old man broke through the Pain Gate and was a martial artist of [Cultivation Level (Grade 6)]. He was naturally at the peak of Black Sand Palm.

"Bank Sand Palm, release poison!"

Song Zhong remained calm, did not take him seriously and drew a circle with his right hand.

Kacha!

The old man was shocked as his right palm met his left palm. The intense energy and poison broke both his arms, as he spat out blood and toppled.

"For someone who is able to train the Black Sand Palm to break through the 6th Gate, you are already a talent. What a pity you won't be able to find out the greatness of what comes after the Pain Gate!"

Song Zhong continued, "When one encounters Pain Gate, he will feel pain! When one reaches Shock Gate, he will hurt his mental state! Death Gate is the worst, if one cannot break through it, he will die! The 3 Perilous Gates, are increasingly harder to break through, and I have already broken through the Shock Gate. My Inner Power, when focused, can be as hard as metal. How will your weak poison even stand any chance against me? Now that I've counter-attacked, your life is on the line!"

"Elder Song.....I have indeed offended you in the past, but I don't think I deserve this!"

The old man imagined death and was filled with sorrow.

"It doesn't matter if you have offended me because I am willing to reason with you, but now that Yujie is dead, why should I care..."

Song Zhong calmly told him, but the old man became increasingly afraid, "Are you suspecting that it's me? No, that's impossible!"

"It doesn't matter if it is you, all of you disciples of the Kou Family will all die!"

Song Zhong pointed his finger at the old man's forehead.

Such a person who was able to break through 6 Gates, and train the Black Sand Palm to such a level, was all but a corpse lying on the floor.

Song Zhong didn't feel much happier after the death of the old man, but felt suspicious, "If what those servants said was true, and Yujie died under the poisonous Black Sand Palm, and yet not by this old man, then how would the other disciples be of any match against Yujie? Did I miss out anything?"

Chapter 28: 5th Gate

Time flowed like water and passed with the ease of a cloth on a weaving machine.

In the blink of an eye, another 10 odd days passed.

"This is the last bit of Vermillion Jade Rice!"

Fang Yuan tilted his head backwards and poured the Vermillion Jade porridge into his open mouth. He immediately felt a warm surge of energy circulate his body.

He looked at his stats window.

"Mm...Black Sand Palm (Grade 4), Proficiency points at 99% already?"

Although the Flower Fox Ferret had confirmed that he had the strength to advance towards lands with spiritual fertiliser, Fang Yuan wanted a more solid guarantee for himself.

Several days of hard work had allowed Fang Yuan to hone his Black Sand Palm technique to a new peak. Even the Eagle Claw Cloth Technique had started to become easier for him. Fang Yuan had broken past [Martial Artist (4th Gate)], which gave him the strong foundations necessary to make his execution of the technique a force to reckon with.

"The Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique provides protection that is more balanced compared to the Black Sand Palm Technique. Danger lurks in the spiritual land. Being well-versed in one more defence technique wouldn't hurt!"

Fang Yuan mumbled to himself, then suddenly adopted a fighting stance.

"Flower Fox Ferret!"

"Hiss!"

The Flower Fox Ferret appeared in a flash of white.

In the face of Fang Yuan's friendly invitation to battle, the ferret looked rather frightened.

After all, from the past few days of training, Fang Yuan's "madness" had intimidated it. Coming into contact with the toxic wind stirred up by the Black Sand Palm technique was not a pleasant experience.

"Haha...when the next Spiritual Rice crop is ready for harvesting, I'll let you eat to your heart's content. How does this sound?"

Fang Yuan knew that the ferret was extremely keen on spiritual rice.

"Hiss!"

At the mention of spiritual rice, the ferret was immediately convinced and jumped at Fang Yuan.

"Excellent!"

Fang Yuan stood his ground confidently without a hint of fear. His hands erupted into a flurry of fists. They looked like black windmills that gave off a dark and menacing wind.

"Huff puff!"

After a while, the Flower Fox Ferret jumped out of the fighting ring and looked alarmed at the figure inside.

"So...it seems like Black Sand Palm (Grade 5) brings me back to the basics!"

He noticed that his hands, which had bulging veins previously, were back to their original states. Even his arms, where the muscles were flexed before, had become lean again.

Still, Fang Yuan could feel internal energy coursing powerfully through his vessels.

Although it seemed like Fang Yuan was back to normal, the potential amount of damage he was capable of dealing had increased by a few times!

He checked out his stats window and noticed that the description of his Black Sand Palm technique had been updated.

Black Sand Palm(5th Grade)-----It is an external technique that has already reached its peak. This causes the user's hands to regain its original look and make them tougher than steel. It is able to shatter gold and break jade, enhanced with poison, and strengthens inner power.

"Inner power?!"

Fang Yuan could indeed feel a more intense inner power flushing his hands, spreading to his arms, chest and even his lower abdomen. It was as if he had become a small oven and was nurturing something within him.

"Inner power woven into a rope-like form to become inner force! This is the essence of the 6th Gate, the Pain Gate.....if one failed to break through the Gate, his whole body would be gravely wounded and he might even die!"

At this point, Fang Yuan had already reached the deep end of martial arts cultivation. If he lost focus for even a moment, the consequences would be extremely dire.

"But now..."

Fang Yuan closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Kacha!"

A literal feeling in his gut told him that he had broken through the Gate.

"Martial Artist (5th Gate), successfully challenged!"

Fang Yuan had only been training for two months, and he had already broken through 5 Gates. This was unprecedented. This was prodigious!

"I have my proficiency points to thank, not to mention the Vermillion Jade Rice and Questioning Heart Tea!"

Fang Yuan did not allow himself to become complacent and looked at his stats.

"Name: Fang Yuan

Essence: 2.7

Spirit: 2.5

Magic: 1.5

Age: 18

Cultivation: [Martial Arts (5th Gate)]

Skills: [Black Sand Palm (Grade 5)], [Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique (Grade 3)]

Specialities: [Medicine (Level 2)], [Botany (Level 3)]

"Eagle Claw Iron Skin technique — Internal and External martial art technique. Whole and without flaws. When trained to Grade 12, by then the body will be impenetrable and resistant to hurt. Complemented by the inner strength of the Eagle Claw! Currently at Grade 3!"

"The later Gates of martial arts cultivation were becoming unnerving. The fifth Gate alone gave me an increase of 0.5 each in both Spirit and Essence. It's a pity that my Magic didn't increase..."

Now, Fang Yuan also realised that Magic was the hardest to level up among the three stats.

He could trigger a prodigious rate of improvement previously all because of the Questioning Heart Tea and the Meditative Tea Ceremony.

The path of the martial arts becomes increasingly difficult as one progresses. It is very easy to suffer a rebound while breaking through the Pain Gate. Breaking through the Shock Gate is taxing on both the heart and the mind, and tests a martial artist's magical energy [1]! If the martial artist's magical energy is too weak, he will suffer a rebound and might become mentally unstable..."

With the Spirit Returning Heart Manual and the Eagle Claw Iron Skin Technique, Fang Yuan could approach the 12 Golden Gates with the utmost confidence.

Of course, in terms of danger, the Pain and Shock Gates paled in comparison to the Death Gate.

Failure to conquer the Pain and Shock Gates would result in serious damage to the body, but at least he would live.

The Death Gate, however, lived by its name. Failure would result in death.

Because of this, even Song Zhong and the old timer martial artists had to be very certain about their chances before attempting to break through!

"And Zhou Tong, who has already mastered all there is to master in the fifth Gate and with his Iron Skin technique at hand, did not dare to challenge the Pain Gate. With his timid character, he will never advance further!"

Fang Yuan shook his head in disdain.

Those with martial arts manuals in their possession, and yet did not dare to make use of them for practice, were the most foolish people in the world.

To be fair, Zhou Tong was the patriarch of the noble Zhou Family, and the family rose or fell together with him. He could not afford to compromise himself in any way.

But the price he had to pay was meekness in the face of more skilled opponents, who had no qualms about taking advantage of him.

"However, according to the masters from the books, and based on my own observations, these 3 Perilous Gates might be intimidating, but as long as the martial artist has an abundance of Spirit, Essence, and Magic, he'll be able to cope well!"

Because of this, Fang Yuan had every confidence in the spiritual fertilizer.

He had to stock up on tea and rice in order to push these three stats into new highs so that he could smash through the 3 Perilous Gates at one go.

"Alright, let's set off today!"

Fan Yuan lifted a bamboo basket onto his back and called out to the Flower Fox Ferret before heading out of the Valley.

When he arrived at the campsite of the Zhou Family, it was apparent that Zhou Weixin had disappeared.

'A servant of the Zhou Family came by with news that Song Zhong had not become totally mad the other day, which set Old Zhou's heart at ease. Furthermore, Miss Zhou finally went home grudgingly after her torturous experience. This is just as well. There is less trouble for me!'

Fang Yuan was dressed in green robes. He let out a sigh of relief.

After all, Song Zhong and Old Zhou were from the same Sect. Song Zhong had lost much and took revenge on his old enemies with a dogged determination. It was worthy to note that he held back from attacking Old Zhou.

He was but an elder of the Spirit Returning Sect and was not invincible.

"The marks that I left behind were definitely insignificant. As long as I do not reveal my skill, especially the Black Sand Palm, who would suspect me...?"

Fang Yuan was extremely self-assured.

The safer the Zhou Family was, the safer he was.

As long as time dragged on, and he kept improving, none of this would matter anymore.

"Ferret, it's your time to shine!"

Fang Yuan patted the ferret's head. Both of them then sped into the forest and disappeared.

Qingye City.

"Useless piece of trash!"

Song Zhong let out a roar. Song San immediately spat out blood and was thrown back several metres onto the ground.

"I wanted information on all the Black Sand Palm experts in the county. I gave you so much time, and yet you turned up with so little..."

Song Zhong began to walk forward slowly as he glanced at the bloodied Song San, his features regaining composure.

"Spare me, Master!"

Song San kowtowed repeatedly.

"The Black Sand Palm is widely practised with so many variations. Song San feels that..."

"Pow!"

Song San's speech had been cut short by a kick to his chest.

"Are you saying that Yujie made a mistake? That he had poor eyesight?"

"Song San did not mean that!"

Song San clutched his chest in pain. He did not dare to even make a sound.

"...Yujie naturally would not be in the wrong. It must be the servants who made mistakes in their anxiousness to leave. Maybe they heard wrong. Or perhaps...please give me more time Master!"

"Hmph, get lost!"

Following Song Zhong's bellow, Song San ran out of the hall wretchedly, his eyes dripping with malice the moment he was out of sight.

"Master!"

After Song San left, a female disciple walked in and greeted Song Zhong with a bow.

"I have followed your instructions and made preparations. Zhou Tong has lowered his guard and has summoned his former disciples..."

"Excellent!"

Song Zhong calmed down slightly after receiving the news, except that his enraged expression gave way to a sly one.

"Let's wait for his precious son to return, and we can deal with them all in one go!"

"But Master, the Zhou Family is one of our own. Additionally, it can be confirmed that during the period where Yujie left us, Zhou Tong was recuperating after being severely poisoned. He had nothing to do with Yujie's death..."

The female disciple looked at Song Zhong with uncertainty.

"...So?"

Song Zhong squinted at her.

"You think I have no idea? We played a part in his poisoning. And Zhou Tong has been in contact with the elders in his territory, telling them that I have been a tyrant....We have to kill this sheep in a display of power to show the rest that I'm not to be trifled with!"

The female disciple listened in silence and spoke after a long while.

"This is ruinous for the Sect."

"Hehe..."

Song Zhong cackled.

"I'll have nothing to do with the downfall of the Zhou Family. It would be the doing of roaming gangsters. As long as we do not leave behind any evidence, who would dare to take an Elder to task?"

"You are mad!"

The female disciple shivered. She could see that her master was becoming more extreme following the death of his beloved son.

"Yujie..."

Song Zhong became oblivious to his surroundings and muttered under his breath.

"All the people that you've ever disliked will not escape. And all those that you were fond of, Papa will deliver to you..."

As the sun began to set, shadows danced on Song Zhong's face like demons around a fire.

[1] The 'Magic' in Fang Yuan's stats window is an indicator of how much magical energy he has.

Chapter 29: Spiritual Land

A thick fog covered the vast green mountains.

In the forest, Fang Yuan and the Flower Fox Ferret were traversing at a speed which could not be seen by the naked eye.

He came to the forest to look for the spiritual fertilizer, which was essential for the development of his skills. Thus, he was rushing to find it.

They reached the Clear Spirit Mountain by noon.

"Come, let's eat!"

Fang Yuan looked at the sky and only saw a faint light from the scorching sun as they were covered by the surrounding trees.

The spiritual Vermillion Jade Rice had run out. Hence, he naturally had to make his rice balls with the Vermillion Jade Rice. This was rather tormenting for him as he was picky about his food.

Similarly, the Flower Fox Ferret was in disdain when it realised the rice balls were not made from the Vermillion Jade Rice. It dived into a nearby bush and dragged a chicken out not long after.

"You are indeed picky!"

Fang Yuan mocked the Flower Fox Ferret and then removed the intestines of the chicken. He went to a river to wash the blood off the chicken and seasoned it with some salt that he brought. He then wrapped the chicken with leaves and started roasting it over the fire.

Not long after, a freshly roasted chicken was made.

As he removed the wrapping leaves, he could smell a strong aroma.

"Oohh.....It melts in the mouth and is not greasy at all. It tastes so fresh...."

This dish also appeared in his dreams. Fang Yuan randomly made this dish on the spot and the Flower Fox Ferret really liked it. This made the Flower Fox Ferret tempted to get another chicken.

"Dreams do come true....."

Fang Yuan had realised that what he dreamt did come true in real life. His life in the dream world was very similar to his in real life.

"Or.....in the slang of the other world, this is a form of 'breakthrough', the only difference is that the current me is the combination of both memories/sides, with equal parts of both worlds.....

He became clear and understood the situation. "Currently, I am Fang Yuan!"

.....

"Let's go!"

Fang Yuan continued on with the Flower Fox Ferret after finishing their lunch.

The Clear Spirit Mountain was indeed deep. There were many rare birds and beasts, with leopards, tigers, wolves and jackals forming the majority. Not many old huntsmen and herb collectors dared to come this deep.

"Roar!"

A very loud roar was coming from the front. A giant tiger with a white forehead jumped out from the trees.

"There are indeed many beasts in this forest!"

Without blinking his eye, Fang Yuan attacked the tiger effortlessly with his right palm. "Black Sand Palm!"

[Black Sand Palm (5th Grade)] gave an ultimate effect from the power it produced. However, both arms and palms did not have any changes, except for a black circle which would appear on the palm when executed.

"Bang!"

Fang Yuan hit the tiger's skull with much force, causing it to roll onto the ground.

This giant tiger had a thick skin. It rolled on the ground and was able to get behind Fang Yuan. It then used its tail like an iron whip and whipped his back.

"Piak!"

Fang Yuan's clothing was torn into pieces.

"Hmm? This tiger is definitely not normal. Even though it is not a spiritual beast, it is not much different from the mutated Pearl Tail Snake previously....."

Fang Yuan was surprised that it was able to survive his Black Sand Palm even though he knew that its skull was the strongest part of the body.

What about the tail?

Fang Yuan had Iron Skin for defence and this tiger had gotten weaker. It was no match for him.

He touched his back and couldn't feel any pain. From the perspective of the Flower Fox Ferret, a fading red print could be seen on his back.

"Roar!"

The giant tiger realised that Fang Yuan was too powerful and decided to run away.

However, not long after it escaped, it became like a drunkard and fell onto the ground, with a dark coloured blood flowing out.

"The combination of the Pearl Tail Snake's poison and Black Sand Palm is a perfect one indeed!"

He then sighed. "Even though I executed the Black Sand Palm, it is actually the poison encapsulated in the Black Sand Palm that killed the tiger. Should I just call it Poison Sand Palm instead?"

"Unfortunately the tiger's bones....."

At that moment, the tiger was poisoned to death and its body was badly destroyed. Fang Yuan regretted a little after seeing the state of the tiger.

"Keke!"

The Flower Fox Ferret passed by proudly but was disdained by the corpse of the tiger.

To it, with the exception of the spiritual tea and spiritual rice, how could a piece of meat be called meat if it was not edible?

"However.....there is definitely something different in this mountain!"

Fang Yuan continued on with a serious look.

From the Flower Fox Ferret, to the Pearl Tail Snake and then the giant tiger. This showed one thing.

This Clear Spirit Mountain is definitely something!

Or maybe, it was due to the influence of something mysterious present here.

The place where the Flower Fox Ferret was bringing Fang Yuan to might be connected to that influence. There could be a chance for them to meet the owner!

"Keke!"

As they go in deeper into the mountain, the Flower Fox Ferret became even more excited. It was also alert and used its claws to gesture to Fang Yuan.

"We are almost reaching our destination?"

Fang Yuan bucked up and looked at the sky. The sun was setting and the place was going to be dark soon.

"We have a little bit of time left. Let's go and have a quick look!"

Fang Yuan bit his teeth and went into the bushes with the Flower Fox Ferret.

"Hooo"

The surroundings suddenly started to fog up, causing the visibility to be poor.

"This fog.....something is wrong!"

It was normal for the top of the mountain to be fogged up all year round but this white fog was way too strong.

If he were to go a few steps deeper, he would not be able to see his fingers. Fang Yuan felt a huge feeling of weariness. His eyelids became heavy and he started to close his eyes unconsciously. He then went into a deep sleep.

"Sleep.....sleep....."

He could hear a voice whispering into his ears and he became in a trance.

"Hold on a second....I shouldn't sleep. If I do sleep, everything will be over...."

Fang Yuan had the magical energy that was beyond a normal human being and it proved its effectiveness. However, it only allowed Fang Yuan to stay alert.

Even though he was aware of his surroundings, he was unable to move his limbs, which made it impossible for him to retreat.

"The hell with it, how does the Flower Fox Ferret make it through here previously if I am like that now?"

Fang Yuan was confused. He then heard noises made by the Flower Fox Ferret and it was getting further away from him.

"Sleep! Sleep....Once you sleep, everything will be alright...."

The weariness got even stronger. Fang Yuan closed and opened his eyes. He shook his head and bit his teeth, "Damn it.....There is something wrong with the fog!"

He forced himself to sit cross-legged and summon forth his inner power to counter the fog.

Normally, his power from his Dantian was able to defend against any threats. This time, it seemed that his power was useless when dealing with such great power from the fog.

"Go to sleep....go to sleep....."

The whisper beside his ear became blurred.

Fang Yuan shuddered and a scene appeared in front of his eyes.

A white-haired elder who was dressed in white was sitting beside the spring water and tasting tea. "My Meditative Tea Ceremony is based on the foundation of trust and respect, breaking away from fate, curbing evil intentions and simplifying matters. Only with these would you have a genuine outlook, peace, and be set on the path to pursue dao."

"A man of heart is a master of his own body and the lord of the gods. He sits still to achieve wisdom, and the slightest movement would bring upon his downfall. In the land of fantasy, the only truth is: Who would be able to comprehend the falsehood within the sweet promises? They dreamt big and underwent multiple events before they realised that there was more to life and that their hearts had changed. Who would have been aware that it was just a big dream..."

.....

"Master!"

A series of his memories appeared. Fang Yuan then realised he was not drowsy anymore. In fact, he was way more alert than before.

He now could confirm that Master Wenxin was not an ordinary person!

Master Wenxin didn't really pass down anything to him.

The Meditative Tea Ceremony was the only precious gift from him.

"Keke!"

"Keke!"

At that moment, when Fang Yuan looked at the white fog, it was no different from any other mountain fog. The Flower Fox Ferret beside him was getting impatient while waiting. It even dragged a very long banana leaf over and the leaf contained cool spring water.

"Are you alright?"

Fang Yuan suddenly understood what happened. "Does the mysterious magical power here target only humans? Or is it because the minds of the wild beasts are pure and that's why they are not affected?"

Obviously, the Flower Fox Ferret had been through here quite a few times already but it did not have the same experience as Fang Yuan. If not, it wouldn't have brought Fang Yuan to this place.

"It's been hard on you!"

After understanding this point, Fang Yuan didn't make things difficult for the Flower Fox Ferret and drank the spring water straight from the banana leaf.

"This water...."

The spring water was clear and sweet. The water cooled his body.

Fang Yuan only drank one sip and he felt way better than before.

"Good spring water!"

He started praising the water.

Fang Yuan had drank before many types of spring water but this spring water with such quality was rare.

"Nope, this is not normal spring water. It is definitely spiritual water!"

Fang Yuan's eyes glittered and asked the Flower Fox Ferret, "Where does this spring water come from?"

"Keke!"

The Flower Fox Ferret stood upright and pointed forward with its claws.

"There again!"

He gave a serious look.

He guessed that the place deep in this fog was probably the source of the mutations that were happening throughout the whole Clear Spirit Mountain. Things like the spiritual fertiliser, spiritual beasts and spiritual water were formed because of that place!

"It seems like I have to go and visit this place...."

Fang Yuan got up and looked determined. "Spiritual land?"

The spiritual land was formed by heaven's will and created by the gathering of earthly energy. It was filled with all kinds of spiritual plants and plenty of spiritual beasts. It is an excellent piece of fertile and sacred land, and a treasure trove!

Chapter 30: Spiritual Bird

"Spiritual land..."

Fang Yuan looked ahead, his eyes full of passion.

Even the lowest grade of spiritual land was a great piece of treasure, and of course, with the rewards came the danger as well.

These spiritual grasses and flowers must have many spiritual beasts lurking around. Take for instance the previous encounter with the Pearl Tail Snake which was guarding the Poisonous Dragon Grass, there had to be many dangerous animals around all these spiritual plants.

"No risk, no rewards, right?"

Fang Yuan clenched his teeth, and looked determined, "Flower Fox Ferret, show me the way!"

The Flower Fox Ferret frequented this route, and it was safe the previous few times it came from here. As long as Fang Yuan stayed wary of the dangerous fog, he should be fine.

"Keke!"

The Flower Fox Ferret was very clever and could lead the way in front, while Fang Yuan followed behind, focusing his inner power to his ears so that he could pick up any danger from the surroundings.

The dangerous fog no longer had the same effect as before, since Fang Yuan recalled his Master's teachings and utilised the Meditative Tea Ceremony.

After a short while, the mountain fog dissipated and the view ahead appeared.

"That is..."

Fang Yuan witnessed the view in front of him and was in awe.

Within his vision, he could see a small green peak covered in a circle of white fog, as though the sky had curtains covering. Once he was inside, the sky was blood red, and the view of the sunset was spectacular.

"Can the wall of fog even cover the entire mountain peak?"

Fang Yuan felt weird, and if not for the Flower Fox Ferret, who was guiding him all the way, he would have been mesmerised and gotten lost.

This place was much more inconspicuous as compared to the secluded valley.

"Hu..."

"Wait up!"

Fang Yuan took a deep breath and felt different.

"Even the air here smells fresher, and with it brings spirituality... A human being can extend his lifespan if he lives here, and if one practises martial arts here, he will experience amazing progress!"

His eyes glittered, "Based on this magical feeling, there is no doubt that this is a piece of spiritual land!"

Fang Yuan felt as though he had won the top prize.

But at this stage, he remained calm, followed the Flower Fox Ferret and ran towards the Green Peak.

Behind the Green Peak was a ridge of barren cliffs, with many black spots on it. As the sky darkened, it became increasingly hard to see.

The Flower Fox Ferret became alert, waved his paws and remained completely silent.

Fang Yuan took in a deep breath and followed it to the bottom of the cliff.

"Eh? This is..."

Under the cliff was a small lake. The lake water was green as jade, and surrounding the lake was white sand all around.

At the bottom of the cliff, the smell of the spiritual fertilizer filled the air, and he became speechless as he looked at the beach ahead.

"This 'beach'... It is all made up of spiritual fertilizer, so much... so much spiritual fertilizer!"

He mumbled to himself and was happy beyond words.

He already knew how the spiritual fertilizer looked like. It was made up of translucent droplets and was everywhere around the beach. A few obvious holes seemed to be dug up by some animal, and the droplets became increasingly transparent with increasing deepness into the beach and the layer on top was pure white.

"It seems that the more transparent the spiritual fertilizer, the more effective it is... I don't even know what formed this beach, I've struck gold!"

Fang Yuan's eyes glittered. He took out his bamboo basket, rolled up his sleeves and was prepared to collect the spiritual fertilizer.

"Squawk!"

At this moment, a fist-sized white bird with red eyes landed on a neighbouring tree and began to squeak in anger.

Its squawking disturbed a neighbouring large bird, which was about 10 times the size of it, like a large eagle. It flew straight at Fang Yuan.

"Hmm? Another type of spiritual bird, this place is indeed very conducive to spiritual things!"

Fang Yuan remained calm, his right hand forming into a claw-shape, and as quick as lightning, "Eagle Claw!"

"Whoosh!"

Amid a short squawk, large amounts of white feathers scattered around.

This large bird could be considered to be a mutant at best, half spiritual bird, but still not a real spiritual animal, so how could it be Fang Yuan's match?

With one swipe, Fang Yuan's Eagle Claw broke its neck.

"Ha ha... Flower Fox Ferret, we have an additional dish for dinner!"

Fang Yuan tossed the spiritual bird into the bamboo basket and smiled at the Flower Fox Ferret.

However, at this point in time, the Flower Fox Ferret jumped at Fang Yuan and pulled on his clothing as though it was running for its life.

"This..."

Seeing how it reacted, it was obvious that it could sense that something extremely dangerous was approaching. Its fur stood up straight.

Fang Yuan decided not to care about the spiritual fertilizer at this moment, picked up his bamboo basket and disappeared like the wind.

"Squawk!"

At his back, the small white bird's squawking increased in intensity.

"Squawk!"

"Squawk!"

...

All the surrounding birds in the vicinity began to squawk, one by one flapped their wings and flew down. It was the Red-eyed White birds from the previous encounter.

"Hisss..."

Fang Yuan was scared out of his wits, and channelled all his inner power to his legs, and ran for his life.

He had to run!

The Red-eyed White Birds covered the entire sky behind him!

With their numbers, even if they were half-spiritual birds, real spiritual beasts would still be no match for them!

The Flower Fox Ferret was also running for its life.

"I finally know why the Flower Fox Ferret didn't want me to come here!"

Fang Yuan ran and his thoughts ran faster, "With their numbers, a normal person could never outrun them and would be pecked to death!"

"To the fog!"

He was a decisive person and chose to run into the fog wall.

The birds chased from above, and even though Fang Yuan had a head start and had the assistance of the inner power, he would be outrun in no time, and the only hope he had was to hide in the dense forest or fog to lose the birds.

"Whoosh!"

The Flower Fox Ferret did not lie to Fang Yuan.

At his current speed, he disappeared into the fog as soon as the Red-eyed White Birds formed a large group and began to chase after them.

"Squawk!"

Having lost track of Fang Yuan, the murderer of their friend, the large group of birds could only circle around the mountain and squawk in sorrow... It could be heard around the entire spiritual land.

After venting their anger, the birds returned to their nest at the top of the cliff, and gradually quietened down.

"Phew..."

Fang Yuan heaved a sigh of relief and dared not to agitate the birds again. He slowly retreated out of the place.

Outside.

After experiencing the spiritual energy within the spiritual land, Fang Yuan felt that the outside world was unbearable, as though the heavens and earth were polluted.

The truth was that the environment of the entire Clear Spirit Mountain was pretty good, but he still felt this way as he compared it to the spiritual land.

"Spiritual land!"

Fang Yuan eyed on the land covered by the fog, and felt emotional, "This spiritual land is all mine!"

He had no reason not to feel this way!

A natural spiritual land was a huge treasure itself, who knew what other spiritual plants might be hidden on the Green Peak, and the spiritual fertilizer, all these were enough for Fang Yuan to drool over.

"And the spiritual birds... Such big birds, the king of these birds must be a spiritual beast, and may even be a grade higher than the Flower Fox Ferret!"

Fang Yuan's biggest wish was to own the entire Green Peak and take it as his own, then shift his spiritual tea and spiritual rice over here.

Nothing in the secluded valley could match up to this spiritual land!

"A pity... I am still not strong enough..."

Fang Yuan frowned, "With so many spiritual birds around, I'm afraid only Wu Zongs can put up a fight?"

Thinking to this point, he looked at his bamboo basket.

Other than a thin layer of spiritual fertilizer, there was a spoil of his battle!

"Ha ha... Flower Fox Ferret, didn't you complain that the beggar chicken is not enough? We can enjoy tonight!"

Fang Yuan carefully observed the spiritual bird in his hands.

It had feathers as white as snow, but its eyes were blood red. It also had talons that glittered like a precious metal, and to top it off, a sharp beak, like a tiny eagle.

After sparring with this spiritual bird, Fang Yuan knew that it was rather strong.

Although it might seem that it could not withstand a single move from Fang Yuan, after all, Fang Yuan was a martial artist at the 5th Gate, equivalent to a deacon from the outside world!

Looking at how fast the Red-eyed White Birds attacked if it was a normal person, a peck and a claw would have been able to dig out an eye!

"What type of mutant bird is this? Why have I not heard of it before? What is it called? Red-Eyed Falcon? White-feathered crow? Red-eyed White Bird?"

Fang Yuan felt like giving it a name and decided, "Mmm... Red-Eyed White Bird sounds best, Ha ha.....I am indeed talented in giving names..."

Unknowingly, the white ferret, who was also forced to adopt the name of Flower Fox Ferret, was speechless and rolled its eyes.

Of course, it only felt unjust for a short while.

The Flower Fox Ferret threw all pride away when he saw Fang Yuan cooked a meal of Beggar Bird Meat. He circled Fang Yuan like a dog trying to please its owner.

"This is creepy, you are a ferret, not a dog, so act like one and have some ferret pride!"

Fang Yuan didn't know to cry or laugh at the scene, tore the Beggar Bird into half and threw it towards the Flower Fox Ferret.

"Keke!"

Flower Fox Ferret pounced and munched on it, and let out a satisfying growl.

To it, what's a little dignity worth when there's good food?

"Mm? Is the taste that good?"

Seeing the Flower Fox Ferret, Fang Yuan took a bite off the bird, and his expression changed.

"This bird meat is more tender than a chicken; it's fragrant and nice too. Delicious! Delicious!"

He gobbled down the bird, rubbed his tummy with satisfaction and felt warmth rising within his body. His expression changed, "This nutrition level should be comparable to a meal of the Vermillion Jade Rice right? As expected from a spiritual bird!"